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ABSTRACT

The organization and implementation of a community school program is discussed under the topics of citizen participation, functions of the community school council, organizational procedures, and coalition building. Community education consists of two components: the provision of a broad diversity of learning opportunities (after-school programs, vocational training, day care centers, etc.) and the direct involvement of citizens in assessing community needs, evaluating services, and advocating community-determined priorities. Citizen participation topics are concerned with purposes, involvement of other citizens, and funding sources. Information on organizing the community school council includes qualifications of members, recruitment of new members, structure, and individual roles. Organizational methods involve conducting informal and formal needs assessments; scheduling, staffing, housing, financing, and publicizing the program; and monitoring and evaluating existing programs. Suggestions for coalition building (establishing relationships among a number of groups, association, and agencies) include a description of programmatic coalitions and communication networks, advocacy, fundraising, and the function and development of informal and formal coalitions. (KC)

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ORGANIZING A COMMUNITY SCHOOL

A Primer for Citizens

By Newton Community Schools

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I. INTRODUCTION

Within the past decade, community members have increasingly expressed significant concern for issues of neighborhood improvement, quality service delivery and citizen involvement. Most specifically, these issues have been raised against a background of several diverse factors, including a reduction of available services, a decline in the traditional school-age population, a developing emphasis on life-long learning, and a demand for accountability of public schools to the communities they are intended to serve.

A highly productive response to these neighborhood concerns is reflected in the striking growth of Community Education programs. In effect, grassroots involvement is the backbone of Community Education and has led to the development of local services that are both relevant and sensitive to needs identified by the community. All this has been accomplished without the addition of new bureaucratic structures or unmanageable budgets. The rationale for this growth lies within a fundamental democratic, decision-making model: a well informed and actively involved community is the optimal decision-maker on issues which profoundly affect citizens' lives.

What Is Community Education?

In essence, Community Education has two primary components. The first is education for the whole community and is put into practice by organizations such as Community School Councils. In this context, education includes the provision of a broad diversity of learning opportunities. These can range from after-school programs for the traditional school-age population to vocational training and re-training programs for adults; or from day-care/parenting centers to services for the elderly. For citizens of all ages, from pre-schoolers through senior adults, Community Education can be an effective vehicle for providing services that are accessible, responsive and critically needed.

The second and most crucial component of Community Education is the direct involvement of citizens in program and policy decision-making. This essential grassroots participation most distinguishes Community Education from other programs. Such citizen involvement is vitally necessary to the development of responsively planned and successfully implemented services. As a result, it is seen as implicit that community members have the rights to: (1) assess community needs at neighborhood and city-wide levels; (2) organize programs; (3) monitor and evaluate services; and (4) advocate for community-determined priorities. Within this scope, Community Education enables citizens to take a new look at community resources, recognizing that traditional education programs are not always adequate and that new options must also be considered. In so doing, citizens come together with schools, community agencies, businesses and local groups to develop collaborative programs, thereby linking resources to the needs of the community.

"A Citizen's Primer" and Newton Community Schools

Over the past three years, people from many diverse communities have requested information from the Community Schools in Newton, Massachusetts, as to how to go about organizing a local community school program. Newton Community Schools (NCS) is a fundamentally grassroots, community-based organization whose structure is founded on citizen decision-making. From policy development to program management, citizen participation forms the hallmark of NCS. Presently, there are 22 community schools in Newton, 20 providing services to residents of all ages and interests, and 2 serving children and youth with special needs and multiple handicaps. In determining policies and services, citizens annually volunteer more than 80,000 hours of their time on behalf of their community. These community efforts have resulted in a dynamic neighborhood response, as illustrated by dramatic increases in program participation, from 6,100 participants in fiscal year 1977 to 13,000 in 1980. Nationally, the organization has been cited for excellence in community programs, inter-agency collaboration and citizen leadership by such groups as the National Municipal League, The National Alliance for Volunteerism, The "Journal of Alternative Human Services," The National Community Education Association, The United States Conference of Mayors, and The United States Department of Education.

Drawing from local experiences, and responding to the many staffs and citizens who have expressed interest in Newton Community Schools, this primer will examine several of the questions and considerations that form a large part of organizing and starting a community schools program. From the first concerns of those people who begin the organizing to issues entailed in final service delivery, this primer is designed for the use and referral of citizens.

II. The Community School

What Is a Community School?

Very simply, the community school is the embodiment of Community Education. It is the vehicle through which the concepts of Community Education are most effectively realized. At its best the community school is a community learning center where citizens can design and enjoy both innovative and traditional programs.

Through citizen participation in community school councils, neighborhood residents have unique opportunities to plan, implement, and evaluate activities and services that respond directly to locally-identified needs. Through the council (Ref. Ch. IV), citizens develop social service, cultural, recreational, educational, and civic activities. Ideally, a community school serves as a forum where citizens can identify local problems and concerns and then follow through by developing programs and responses.

What Is the Impact of a Community School?

Will a community school make a difference in the quality of life in a particular neighborhood? Why? In what ways? As a structure for community and personal development, community schools have proven to be effective in bringing people together. By encouraging neighbors to join with one another in identifying and solving concerns of local importance, community schools have provided a framework for effective citizen decision-making. This is exemplified by local teen programs which have helped discourage vandalism; senior health maintenance clinics which have saved lives; and mom/tot drop-ins which have alleviated the isolation of many young parents.

The community school provides a structure and a process through which citizens of diverse ages and backgrounds can jointly assume vital leadership roles in their community. It is this fundamental citizen involvement that results in (1) citizen ownership of the community school program; (2) relevant, responsive services; and (3) opportunities for citizens to act effectively on issues that directly affect neighborhood life. Community schools make a difference because they supply citizens with an avenue for meaningful decision-making and participation.

Most community schools operate out of local public school facilities. While some pre-school and senior programs are offered during traditional school hours, most programs take place during afternoons, evenings, and week-ends. This extension of facility use is a major attraction of community schools. It is a sensible use of tax dollars because public school buildings can become service centers for all residents, involving those not reached by traditional K–12 programs. Instead of accommodating only a segment of the population, facility access is provided to all — including pre-schoolers, adults and seniors. In this way a feeling of public ownership is fostered. If people have a personal stake in something, they are much more likely to care about it. In many communities where community schools have been in operation, both residents and public officials have supported bond issues for public school construction and renovation, even during periods of fiscal austerity.

In addition to providing maximum public access to school buildings, many community schools generate outside funds. Some raise more in federal, state, and private grants than they draw from city or town budgets. Community schools are a cost-effective way to provide vitally needed, user-determined community services.

Why Do Citizens Need To Organize?

The democratic structure of the community school plays an important role in bringing community residents together to organize around issues that are critical to the well-being of the community. In response to tax cap legislation and fiscal austerity, locally and nationwide, citizens are increasingly looking within their neighborhoods for resources and support. As many services are being deleted from municipal, state, and federal budgets, citizens are seeing a necessity to organize within the community to both maintain and improve service delivery levels.

In order for governmental structures to be responsive to constituent needs, policy makers must know what those needs are. As concerned citizens identify local and city-wide needs and begin to develop programs, they must ensure that public servants support the community's priorities. A united appeal for services from an organized group is far more effective than disjointed individual requests. Organize and be heard! Effective community schools, by supplying an organizational framework which encourages citizen participation, ensure that citizens (1) determine services; (2) monitor the use of resources; and (3) advocate for those programs and issues that are important to the community, locally and city-wide.

III. Citizen Participation in Organizing a Community School

Why Is Citizen Participation So Important?

The hallmark of an effective community school is citizen decision-making. If a community school is to be successful, policies and programs must be determined by community members, for community members. Residents should play leadership roles in determining services because as the recipients of the programs they are in the best position to decide what programs are responsive and sensitive to needs felt within the community. After successfully identifying local concerns and developing responsive, relevant services, community members also monitor the effectiveness of programs. This chance to monitor programs, first-hand, enables citizens to continually reassess and evaluate services. (Reference: Chapter V).

Citizens working together are their own best resources. By serving on local community school councils (Reference: Chapter IV), citizens can play vital leadership roles. In so doing, they learn to develop organizational and community advocacy skills.

Who Starts a Community School?

Initially, a group of citizens will coalesce to discuss starting a community school. These individuals may be prompted by the present lack of after-school activities for their children. A number of community members may have expressed a desire for a wide range of innovative learning opportunities. Local seniors might be investigating ways to continue a nutrition program that is about to exhaust its funding source. A community

that is concerned with the quality and value of its educational and social services is a natural host for a community school.

When advocating for a community school, it is important for the initial group to develop a broad base of support. The group may consider asking members of the school board, local clergy, directors of neighborhood civic agencies, representatives of social groups, parents and others to participate in the organizing process. Having many citizens knowledgeable and supportive of the community school process and program is significant. Experienced neighborhood organizers can be invaluable resources when called upon to advocate for the start-up of a community school. Their organizational skills will prove helpful in pointing the way for the new community school. Inexperienced group members are also vital to the organizing process. They bring fresh perspectives and energy to the undertaking.

Once this initial group has formed, the next steps in organizing can begin. In this framework, there are several areas of consideration the group will want to outline and discuss.

What Should Be Considered When Starting a Community School?

Citizens will want to think through the various phases of their organizing process. The following checklist is an example of questions that will need to be considered. Ensuing sections will elaborate on these concerns:

What is our purpose for organizing?
How will our organization be structured?
How do we involve other citizens?
Where do we go for funding?

What Is Our Purpose?

Before the initial group can effectively organize a community school, it is critically important that the group's reasons for organizing be conceptualized. In what directions do you want to move? Is your purpose to provide supplemental after-school programs for school-age children? Do you want to focus on teens? Is your purpose to offer a variety of educational and cultural activities to specific target groups within the community? Is there a pressing need for services to special needs children and adults? Or might the group wish to initiate a comprehensive program of cultural, social, educational, and recreational activities for the entire community?

The group's reasons for organizing should be as specific as possible. Although these goals may change over time, having clear objectives will help facilitate organizing efforts.

There is no blueprint or model purpose for a community school. By its very nature, each community school will reflect its community's singularity. Each beginning group's purpose will be specific to its host community's needs. Agreement upon a common purpose or set of purposes enables the group to move ahead and work together toward common goals. By setting clear and potentially-reachable initial ends, the group members will not only be less likely to become discouraged, but also they will be more likely to be successful.

How Will the Initial Organization Be Set Up?

Once the group's purpose has been clarified, the next task is to decide what organizational structure will best facilitate the introduction of the community school into the community. The group must pick the best way for its members to work together. Some groups will produce better results in an informal atmosphere; others will require a more formal structure (see Chapter IV). Whatever the final choice, care should be taken to (1) provide an atmosphere that is conducive to people speaking up and being heard; (2) draw from experienced people while encouraging full and active participation from previously uninvolved community members; (3) enable information gathering and effective use of information and (4) foster feelings of ownership of the community school.

Involving Other Citizens

Many people feel the need to voice their opinions and become involved in issues that truly affect their community. Concerned residents may not know where to channel their energies. They may not know how to be heard. Some may be new to the community. They may be apprehensive about approaching the "doers" with their ideas. In any case, the citizen resource pool is there. It wants tapping.

Outreach activities can include many strategies and extend to the limits of the organizers' imaginations. Examples follow:

1) Attend local P.T.A. meetings and present your plans.
2) Hold a public information forum.
3) Ask a local newspaper to donate advertising space.
4) Advertise in local school newspapers.
5) Send flyers home with school-age children to reach parents in the community
6) Visit senior citizen housing sites or service centers.
7) Solicit community participation via mass mailings.
8) Set up information booths at local shopping centers.
9) Visit local social, civic, and business associations and agencies.
10) Visit public housing sites.
11) Visit local pre-schools, churches, and synagogues

The single most important component of a community outreach process is personal contact. Get out and talk to people. Let the community know where and who you are and what your group hopes to accomplish. People cannot support something if they do not know it is there. The more people you can reach directly, the better your chances of success.

Funding: Where To Go?

There are four basic funding models for community schools. They are outlined briefly below:

(1) **School-Based Model** — In this case, the community school is a department or division of the city/town School Department. Its core funding comes from the School Department budget and the community school is ultimately responsible to the School Board, acting through the Superintendent of Schools. To discuss the likelihood of starting this type of community school, community representatives will need to contact the Superintendent and Chairperson of the School Board.

(2) **Municipal Model** — In this case, the community school is a city/town department. Core funding is drawn from the town or city budget and the community school is ultimately responsible to the Mayor or Town Manager. To discuss the possibility of using this model, it will be neccessary to contact the Mayor or Town Manager and the City/Town Council.

(3) **School-Municipal Model** — In this case, the community school is a semi-independent agency with core funding coming jointly from School Department and city/town budgets. Usually, the community school is responsible to a Commission consisting of representatives of both funding sources. To explore this funding possibility contact the School Superintendent, the School Board Chair, the Mayor, and the City Council.

(4) **Private:Non-Profit** — In this case, the community school is an independent organization. It is incorporated and tax-exempt. Its funding comes from grants, fees, and contributions. The corporation is responsible to its Board of Directors and must report annually to the Internal Revenue Service.

When deciding on a funding model, primary concern should be given to choosing the one that will (a) provide an adequate budget; (b) encourage maximum citizen participation in decision-making and (c) allow as much programming independence as possible.

Before the group approaches a funding source, it is important to do some background research and preparation. Find out who in authority is most sympathetic to your

goals. Then organize a team to represent your organizing group, taking into account balancing such factors as race, ethnicity, gender, age, and background. Be able to state your goals clearly and have an idea of what you want the funders role to be. Also try to anticipate what the funder will expect in return for financial support (i.e. patronage, authority, control, benefits for citizens, service provision, etc.). Imagine what the funder will want to hear and be truthful about what you say in response. Envision possible problems and develop solutions. It will be helpful to review questions you anticipate being asked and to have answers ready. At your meetings with funders you may be asked:

(a) Who is involved? Is your group representative of the entire community?
(b) What do you plan to accomplish?
(c) How are you going to do it?
(d) What will it cost?
(e) Why are you approaching us for money?
(f) What will you do if we do not fund you?
(g) To what extent will you be accountable to us?
(h) How do you plan to evaluate your effectiveness?
(i) Why should we fund you?
(j) What role can we play in your organization?

It is at this point that local support for the community school will prove vital. If the organizing group can present a convincing argument to a potential funding source and secure start-up money, it can then form a community school council and start developing a program. The following chapters deal with these aspects of the community school.

IV. Interested Citizens Organize the Community School Council

What Is the Community School Council?

The community school council is the vehicle which enables citizen participation in the community school. By joining a council, citizens are able to contribute their energies and expertise in developing directions for their community school's programs and governing policies. Councils vary greatly from setting to setting, both in terms of their responsibilities and their composition. Some councils are set up to be advisory groups, others to be decision-making bodies. Some are formally structured incorporated bodies, others are highly informal. Many are comprised entirely of citizens, others include citizens and agency personnel. Joining a council is a way for citizens to be actively involved in decisions that affect their community school. As a result, when organizing a community school, local citizens need to plan carefully to ensure that the voice of their community truly has an impact on the council.

Where To Begin?

When organizing a council, a primary concern for citizens is to clarify the council's responsibilities and jurisdiction. Basically, this is important so that potential future conflicts between the council and the funders (e.g. School Board) can be minimized. For example, does the School Board want to have the council involved in hiring staff? Is the council an advisory body? If so, what does this mean? In which areas does decision-making rest solely with the council? To what extent will council members be involved on issues of programming and policy-setting? These and related concerns are both procedural — identifying ways in which the council will operate — and, oftentimes, politi-

cally charged. How these issues are addressed, and who is involved in addressing them, will distinctly effect a council's future roles. Consequently, even though it is difficult for a newly organized group to know precisely which functions it would like to fulfill, it is strongly recommended that the group plan and negotiate, where necessary, for as much flexibility and decision-making authority for citizens as possible. Although many early agreements can be later modified, they also highly influence the tone for future discussions and negotiations. As a result, it is very important for an organizing group to carefully approach initial discussions dealing with the council's role.

Who Should Be on the Council?

The degree to which the council is representative of the community will greatly impact on the range of programs eventually offered by the community school. Hence, the composition of the council is vitally important. An effective council reflects its community's diversity in terms of economic background, ethnicity, race, sex, and age. Many councils are designed to include agency, city, and/or school personnel. This can often create conflicts of interest should the council, as a whole, pursue a program or policy direction which, while serving the community, ruffles a particular agency's feathers. For this reason, and to ensure maximum citizen involvement, many effective councils are comprised entirely of lay citizens including area teens, young parents, senior adults, the handicapped, and so on. The broader the citizen representation on a council, the greater the likelihood that the community school will be responsive and sensitive to the community's needs.

How Much Previous Community Involvement Must One Have Had To Join a Council?

It is not necessary to have had previous community service experience in order to join a community school council. A representative council will bring together a wide range of people. Some will have been involved with the initial organizing group, others will be getting involved in community affairs for the first time. An effective council is one whose members learn, grow, and work together. Accordingly, a council benefits most when members bring their concern, honesty, and energy to discussions regarding programs and policies.

How Are New Members Recruited?

To encourage broad citizen participation on a council, attention must be given to the logistics of council meetings. In this context, care should be taken when selecting meeting times and places. The availability of child-care should be considered, as well as

the language in which meetings are conducted. These are all factors which can influence people's decisions about whether or not to attend a meeting.

In attempting to develop an active, representative council, it is necessary to broaden the group beyond the initial organizers. Thus, it is important to be aware of several factors which often motivate people to join community groups. Although there are countless variables, citizen involvement is usually a result of some basic factors.

(1) **As a Chance to Accomplish Something** — Some people see community schools as an opportunity to develop a particular idea or program. Whether it be a puppetry workshop for children, English as a Second Language for adults, or a neighborhood forum on the quality of municipal services, community schools offer a creative outlet for citizens.

(2) **As a Civic Responsibility** — There are many people who believe that citizen involvement is a moral responsibility.

(3) **As a Way to Protect Special Interests** — A few people are sometimes threatened by newly organizing community groups or by the prospect of change in the way things are normally done. They might join a council to protect a level of activity or inactivity to which they have close ties.

(4) **As a Way to Meet People** — This includes citizens who join to socialize with others as well as residents who might join to combat personal isolation. New residents of a community will often join one of the first groups they hear about. You should try to reach these people quickly.

(5) **As a Favor** — Initial involvement by friends and neighbors often results from their being acquainted with a member of the organizing group, rather than from a particular commitment or obligation to the program itself.

When recruiting council members, every available way to reach people should be utilized. Public forums, senior citizen drop-in centers, day-care centers, village fairs, visits to public and senior housing sites, cultural festivals and informal one-to-one discussions can all provide opportunities to explain and build interest in a community school council. While mailings to the community, as a whole, or to special target groups are definite options, it is critical to realize that nothing is more effective than talking to people singly, either face-to-face or by telephone. Personal contact not only demonstrates your sensitivity and appreciation of their interest, it helps people feel that their contributions are sought and respected.

What Should Council Structure Be?

There are a number of ways in which a community school council can be structured.

In essence, the best structure is one which (1) complements and supports the council's goals and objectives, and (2) encourages citizen participation. To ensure the selection of an effective structure, it is critically important that all members of the council be involved in the choice. The greater ownership participants feel in their council, the greater their interest and activity will be.

Some councils choose a formal organizational structure. This frequently involves the development of by-laws, the adoption of parliamentary procedures (e.g. using a *Robert's Rules of Order*), and a highly structured format for conducting meetings. For many citizens, such a formal structure intrinsically connotes that meetings and time will be well-managed. Yet, formally structured councils can also face very distinct problems. They may become so heavily tied up with administrative procedure that insufficient attention is focused on issues that really matter to many council members.

A council which selects an informal structure tends to have a more relaxed atmosphere. This is often conducive to discussion, something that is particularly appreciated by people who have difficulty or feel uncomfortable speaking in formal settings. At informally structured council meetings, it is especially important for group leaders to keep discussions focused on community issues and ensure that each individual's views are heard. Otherwise, conversation can quickly become disjointed or disruptive.

There are several concerns that a council, whether structured formally or informally, must carefully address if it is to be an effective body. These include such questions as:

- In what areas and to what extent does the council have decision-making authority?
- In what areas and to what extent does the council operate in an advisory capacity?
- Who determines the scope of council involvement?
- What is the relationship of the council to the community school's funders? To elected officials? To community school staff? And to the community-at-large?
- How large is the council?
- How frequently will new council members be sought?
- Within the council structure, who determines which issues will be addressed?
- How will issues be addressed? By the council as a whole? By long-term committees? By short-term task forces?
- How is decision-making delegated and shared on the council?

What Roles Are There for Individual Council Members?

On a dynamic, representative community school council, citizens can fulfill diverse community leadership roles. The extent of such citizen participation is often affected by the requirements of the jobs that need to be done. As a result, it is important to identify, to whatever extent possible, the specific objectives and responsibilities of each of the council's tasks. Further, it is helpful to identify the time commitment necessary to complete the tasks. This kind of information will enable council members to understand and

comfortably participate in council activities. Moreover, council activities can be extremely extensive, including such areas as:

- Conducting and interpreting regular needs-assessments,
- Program planning and budgeting,
- Scheduling and publicity,
- Program implementation and evaluation,
- Grant development,
- Advocacy for the community school,
- Council outreach and membership renewal,
- Relations with agencies, funding sources, and elected officials,
- Personnel selections and policy,
- Citizen training,
- Organizing citizen action,
- Formulating policy.

What Are the Ways To Approach Council Leadership?

Whether organized with advisory or decision-making functions, formally or informally structured, the extent of citizen participation will greatly determine the effectiveness of the council. As citizens identify and develop their skills and areas of interest, the foundation is established for the community to have a real impact. Within this framework, it is vital that the council have effective leadership.

Most councils elect a chairperson to facilitate meetings and overall community school business; many councils select an executive committee, as well. Regardless of the approach taken (individual or group), it is essential that council leadership be skilled politically. There are advisory councils that make a wide range of policy and program decisions; conversely, there are decision-making councils that are frequently manipulated by their staff or funding sources. Oftentimes, the extent of the council's decision-making results not only from its structured authority, but also from the effectiveness of council leadership in representing, organizing, and advocating for the voice of the community.

In addition to the political responsibilities, the council also looks to its leadership for on-going support and direction. This is a leadership responsibility that is sometimes overlooked. Consequently, whenever a meeting is called, it is important that the council leadership have an idea of what it plans to accomplish. In most cases, you will find it helpful to pass out an agenda and explain at the start what you hope the group with accomplish. Meetings that have a well-defined purpose provide for a more effective use of time and give members a greater sense of accomplishment at the meeting's end.

It should be stressed that the nature of grassroots programs is the sharing of ideas and responsibilities via the democratic process. The council meeting is a forum for citizens to

express opinions, share ideas, and make needs felt. All council members should have an equal say in the decision-making process.

It is vital to keep in mind the needs of the council members, as well as the needs of the program. While some people might have a clear task orientation, others might be more prone to socialize. Council leaders will have to balance these expectations and keep the meeting flowing. The following tips demonstrate the basic areas of concern for running a meeting:

(1) Make sure the room is comfortable and appropriate to the occasion in terms of lighting, seating, etc.
(2) Keep the atmosphere comfortable and relaxed; refreshments help.
(3) Have council members and visitors introduce themselves so everyone knows who is present.
(4) Develop agendas of what is to be accomplished. This can be done at the meeting, but preferably is done beforehand.
(5) Give participants ample opportunity to discuss their ideas and opinions while keeping the meeting on track.
(6) Reinforce good ideas. It is a nice touch to tell someone they raised a good point or made a good suggestion.
(7) Follow through on all suggestions. Have a record kept of who expressed interests and delegate responsibilities accordingly.
(8) Follow up on assignments. Set a positive example as a leader by being responsible.

There are a variety of other factors that will contribute to making the council meeting run smoothly and cohesively. The most important, however, is to support and strengthen the direct involvement of council members in planning and implementing the community school.

V. The Community School Program: Getting Organized

What Is a Community School Program?

A community school program is any activity or service that is sponsored by a community school council. Community school programs vary dramatically from one location to another. In one neighborhood, programming might be primarily directed at teens while in another the focus may be on senior services.

Programs are generally designed for a specific audience. An audience can be defined by various factors. Included are:

age: pre-schoolers, children, teens, adults, seniors,

interest: ethnicity, parents, homeowners, consumers, tenants, handicapped, women, etc.,

locale: designated streets, neighborhoods, school districts or towns.

In addition, programming can be developed in a number of formats, ranging from one-time special events to on-going seminars and classes. Because of their flexibility in both content and format, community school programs have considerable potential for

neighborhood impact. Accordingly, a council can develop a wide range of programs to meet local needs.

The following sample program directory demonstrates an effective utilization of community school program flexibility:

Pre-School Activities:	
Play Group	M–W–F 9–10:30 a.m. on-going
Parent/Child Movement	Tu. 9–10:30 a.m. on-going
Health Clinics	1st Tu. of month 9–11 a.m.
Children's Activities	
Book Club	Alt. Th. 3–4 p.m. on-going
Math Fun	Weds. in Oct. 3–4 p.m.
Arts & Crafts (gr. K–2)	Mon. 3–4 p.m. 12 wks.
Arts & Crafts (gr. 3–4)	Mon. 4–5 p.m. 12 wks.
Open Gym	M–W–F 3–5 p.m. on-going
Girls Basketball	Tu. 3–5 p.m. on-going
Boys Gym Hockey	Th. 3–5 p.m. on-going
Coed Basketball	Fri. 3–5 p.m. on-going
Film Festival	2nd Sat. month 10 a.m.–12 noon
Museum Trips	3rd Sat. month 10 a.m.–4 p.m.
Teen Activities:	
Photography	Mon. 3–5 p.m. 10 wks.
Ceramics	Fri. 3–5 p.m. 10 wks.
Open Gym	M–W–F 6–8 p.m. on-going
Drop-In	Sat. 5–9 p.m. on-going
Tutoring Sessions	Wed. 3–5 p.m. on-going
Alcohol & Drug Abuse Seminar	2nd Sat. May 10 a.m.–4 p.m.
Adult Activities:	
Slimnastics	Th. 9–11 a.m. on-going
Parenting Discussion	last Wed. of month 7:30–9 p.m.
Painting	Wed. 7–9 p.m. 8 wks.
Men's Basketball	Wed. 8:30–10 p.m. on-going
Women's Basketball	Th. 8:30–10 p.m. on-going
Coed Basketball	Fri. 8:30–10 p.m. on-going
Chinese Cooking	Th. 7–9 p.m. 6 wks.
Tenants' Rights Lecture	Tu. May 6 7–9 p.m.
Review of Children's Literature	Tu. May 13 7–9 p.m.
Ballet Trip	Sat. May 24 6–11 p.m.
Practical Law Series	1st Mon. Mar/Apr/May 7–9:30 p.m.

Senior Activities:	
Hot Lunch Program	M thru F 11:30 a.m.—1 p.m. on-going
Quilting Bee	Mon. 10—11:30 a.m. on-going
Exercise Group	Th. 10—11:30 a.m. on-going
Creative Writing	Fri. 1—2:30 p.m. 8 wks.
Oral History Group	Tu. 2—4 p.m. ongoing
Theatre Group	Wed. 2—4 p.m. ongoing
Health Clinics	Alt. Weds. 9 a.m.—3 p.m. on-going
Field Trip	Fri. May 23 10 a.m.—4 p.m.

Planning a comprehensive community school program entails a number of tasks: needs assessment, program design, staff selection, management, publicity, and evaluation. The following sections outline each of these areas.

Carrying Out and Using a Needs Assessment

As discussed in Chapter III, a needs assessment is a process used in identifying areas of concern. For the community school council, a needs assessment is the first step in program planning. Needs assessments will reveal what the community wishes its community school to be. The process can be approached in a variety of ways, informal and formal.

Informal: The council is constantly engaged in impromptu needs assessments. Casual conversations with friends, acquaintances, and neighbors often provide valuable insights into issues of community concern. Several area parents might be distressed over their pre-schoolers' lack of opportunity to relate to their peers. Teens might express feelings of boredom, while local elders find themselves unable to understand communications from their social security office. These informal remarks, when considered collectively, can point up programming directions. The council, however, will have to interpret these programmatically to successfully use the information.

It will be unusual for someone to explicitly identify his or her concerns in the form of a program suggestion. It is rare, indeed, for a senior citizen to ask: "Why doesn't the community school offer a ten week poetry group for seniors on Friday mornings?" Questions and suggestions will take a more general form. The questions asked above would probably take this form: "I love to read poetry. Wouldn't it be nice to have someone to talk with about it?" Teens might say: "There's nothing to do!" not "I'd like to learn how to take and develop photographs." or "I'd like to learn to make leather sandals." It is the responsibility of the community school council to develop relevant programmatic responses to the community's concerns.

Formal: As a complement to on-going informal needs assessments, many councils implement regular, methodical appraisals: formal needs assessments use structured methods to solicit information. Surveys or questionnaires are used most often. Examples

of formal assessment techniques include a city census, mass mailing, and door-to-door or telephone interviews. Some important considerations for planning a formal assessment follow.

(a) **Goal** — Have a clear image of what the assessment is to accomplish. Are responses to specific questions being solicited for evaluation? Should general program ideas be sought? Are respondents to be identified or to remain anonymous? It is important to provide a brief introduction explaining what the community school is and the purpose of the survey. This will help people understand why completing the survey is worthwhile.

(b) **Format** — Be concise! The simpler the form is to complete, the higher the response rate is likely to be. Yes/no, true/false and rating questionnaires tend to be more effective than those requiring paragraph answers.

(c) **Distribution** — Methods of distribution and collection are of critical importance. The more personalized the distribution, the higher the return rate. Ideally, people should be able to complete the questionnaire quickly with a council member present. The response is collected upon completion. Possible distribution centers include schools, libraries, shopping centers and churches. Mass mailings require a higher level of coordination. Attention must also be paid to the cost of such a venture. Mailing return rates can be unpredictable; however, their potential for reaching great numbers of people in the community is worth considering.

(d) **Results** — Whenever possible, the survey results should be made public. Press releases, posters, or public service announcements are valuable communication tools. In addition to providing good publicity, the publication of survey results demonstrates to the community its direct impact on community school programming.

(e) **Follow-Up:** In those instances where community members (1) identify their interests and concerns and (2) indicate who they are, it is extremely valuable to follow up survey responses. Whenever possible, citizens who express interest in a particular program should be contacted directly, at the very least, before the activity begins. Such contact can dramatically increase participation in the community school's programs.

A comprehensive needs assessment can substantially increase a community school's visibility. Surveys often generate publicity on a par with the information they produce. Frequently, a survey is a citizen's first contact with a community school. In addition to publicity, surveys can help identify potential council members. By providing an opportunity for citizens to easily express their interest in joining the council, needs assessments act as effective recruiting tools. Persons indicating a desire for involvement should be contacted immediately and welcomed to the next council meeting. Finally, surveys

are a meaningful way to involve a substantial number of community members in the planning process. Many people are willing to carry out specific tasks on a short-term basis. Surveying and tabulating are enjoyable, pleasant, short-term jobs that require large numbers of people and provide visible results. By delegating these tasks to as many people as possible, the council increases community ownership of and participation in the community school.

How Is a Community School Program Designed?

With local needs identified, the community school council is ready to develop a program. To do so, the council must discuss possible programmatic responses to community-identified needs. The prospects for providing such programs must also be considered. The council must determine what it can do to impact on areas of community concern. Some questions worth considering are:

- What does the community feel it needs?
- Which needs are most important?
- Are services presently available to meet any of the identified needs?
- What types of services can best satisfy identified needs?
- What resources are available to the council?
- What program would form an ideal response?

Once an initial program idea is established (e.g. a Senior Citizen Activities Series), the council can begin making actual program arrangements. As the arrangements proceed, the final program will take form. The following are areas of consideration in program arrangement:

(1) **Scheduling** — What is the best time, day, and place for the program? Try to minimize potential time conflicts. For example, children's participation will be hampered on days of religious instruction; seniors prefer not to go out after dark. Scheduling concerns are critical to a program's success. No matter how good a program may appear, if scheduled at a time when people cannot attend, it will not be successful.

(2) **Staffing** — Who is going to lead the activity? Program staff differ distinctly from community school to community school. In one location, courses may be taught by part and/or full time personnel (e.g. Art and Crafts Director, Gym Supervisor, etc.). At another location programs are led by neighborhood volunteers. Some schools hire class instructors on an hourly basis. Whatever the case, program staff should be qualified for their responsibilities. A community school's reputation is, in part, dependent on the quality of instruction.

Many community members first become involved in a community school as program leaders. A local veterinarian might lead a pet care program for children; a jogging enthusiast might coordinate a running group; or a skilled needleworker might teach a class in advanced embroidery. A community school can be a center where people share their expertise as well as their concerns. Programs should be designed to take advantage of the talents and skills available within the neighborhood.

Once program leaders have been recruited, other program arrangements will fall into place. Class instructors often know from past experience how long a program should run (one time, on-going, ten weeks, etc.). They will also know what materials will be necessary and how many people can effectively participate. Also, a program leader will usually know other people who are also willing to lead specific activities.

Having made contact, the council must then clarify its expectations of the program leader and vice versa. Before any activity begins, instructors should understand their responsibilities, as well as council personnel policies and procedures.

(3) **Space** — An appropriate setting must be secured for any proposed activity. Once program content and scheduling are arranged by the council and the instructor, the necessary facilities must be reserved. Usually, this will entail confirming room reservations with the school principal or custodian. Occasionally, arrangements will be made with alternate facilities such as a library, municipal building, business or private home. Whatever space the council chooses should be suitable to the activity. Expectations among all parties concerned (council, program leader, space donor, custodian, and participants) should be clearly delineated.

(4) **Finances** — Programming is dramatically affected by financial resources. Therefore, the council must have reliable, accurate information on the costs of the proposed services. For each program, the council should anticipate all possible expenses (instructors' fees, supplies, facility charges) and sources of income (core budget, grants, donations, registration fees). The determination of how these expenses are to be met (for example, user fees versus a foundation grant), rests with the council. In making its decision, the council should consider the practicality of available options. Key areas of consideration are: (1) What would the community donate or pay for the activity? (2) Is the activity appropriate for a user fee system? (3) Who else might be willing to support the program? and (4) Is the activity fundable through a government or foundation grant? Not every program will, nor should be expected to meet its expenses. Further, cost should not prevent either individuals or families, who have economic restrictions, from participating in activities. It is necessary however, for the overall community schools budget to balance. As a result, fund-raising or high-enrollment programs can be used to subsidize the expenses of the total program.

(5) **Publicity** — Once the program has been developed and preparations have been made, the council will need to publicize it. A good publicity campaign will inform and excite the community. The more creative a council can be in its public relations activities, the more community interest will be heightened. In general, publicity materials should stress the following information: types of activities available, times, days, locations, costs, personnel, and who to contact for more information. Information can be disseminated in many ways.

(a) *Mailings* — Community schools usually produce a city-wide or neighborhood mailing at regular intervals. Using bulk mail permits, it is an inexpensive, effective tool for informing large numbers of people. Mailings should be clear, concise, attractive and, where necessary, multi-lingual. If feasible, they should be professionally designed and printed. An attractive mailing will impress the public with the quality of the community school's programs. It is well worth the expense. An accurate, up-to-date mailing list of participants, funding agencies, and local institutions should also be kept. Smaller mailings to this core list can often be advantageous.

(b) *Newspapers* — Local newspapers are generally willing to publish announcements and articles about community school activities. The council should contact local papers for information on publication deadlines, names of calendar editors, typing format and preferred style. When submitting a press release or announcement, be certain that information is accurate and appropriately written. For more comprehensive articles featuring the community school program, in general, or a particularly noteworthy program or person, contact the paper's feature editor to discuss style and content. The council should attempt to establish a working relationship with key newspaper staff. This will greatly facilitate publication of releases and announcements and provide coverage for the community school program. A record of all published materials (clips) dealing with the community school should be maintained and updated regularly.

(c) *Radio/T.V. Announcements* — Federal rulings require that radio and television stations provide time for public service announcements. When the council wishes to submit a public service announcement for broadcast, contact the station's public service coordinator. Ask him/her to explain guidelines, format, and deadlines. These people may prove difficult to contact but most helpful when reached. Discuss what the council wishes to have presented and ask for suggestions. Most media stations are sympathetic to community groups. What the council needs to learn is how to get information to them.

(d) *Posters and Flyers* — Information dealing with programs for a special interest group can be extremely effective. For example, a senior health program can be publicized using posters and/or handouts at senior housing complexes and nursing homes. Children's activities can be announced via take-home flyers dis-

tributed at school. Posters and flyers are most effective when utilized for specific audiences, designed attractively, and done in an easy-to-read fashion. They should be multi-lingual when necessary. A highly effective publicity vehicle, posters and flyers are inexpensive and should be used consistently and creatively. Often when councils provide the paper stock, public schools will provide access to mimeo/duplicating machines.

(e) *Word-of-Mouth* — Finally, direct, person-to-person contact is also an effective means for publicizing a program or event. Council members should share their enthusiasm about the community school's program with friends, family, and neighbors. Informal, word-of-mouth publicity builds community support and participation. People are more likely to take part in an activity if they have heard about it from a friend. All those involved in the community school process — council members, program leaders, and participants — are valuable public relations resources.

Each of the above-mentioned publicity tools complement one another. Utilization of a cross-section of public relations materials will facilitate community outreach and increase the base of community support for the program.

Everything Has Been Done. What Next?

Having accomplished each pre-activity task, the council's next responsibilities are to monitor and evaluate the programs. These often-overlooked tasks can provide relevant information regarding program needs, design, and effectiveness.

(1) **Monitoring Programs** — While activities are underway, the council should keep accurate records on the following:

(a) **Participation** — Accurate compilations of registrants' names, addresses, and phone numbers should be kept.

(b) **Attendance** — Who participated in a particular program? For how long? Did attendance drop substantially? Did it rise over time?

(c) **Miscellaneous** — Did the program leader voice concerns? Was the space suitable? Did weather have an affect on the program? Were any sessions cancelled? Why?

Throughout the program's duration, the council should informally solicit opinions from participants and instructors. By casually asking: "How are you enjoying that course?" the council can develop a sense of an offering's effectiveness. If necessary, mod-

ifications in scheduling or format can be made to improve the activity. Good instructors will welcome constructive suggestions. It makes their work easier and more rewarding.

(2) **Evaluating Programs** — As a complement to on-going monitoring, the council should create formal evaluation mechanisms. As with the needs assessments, program evaluations should be clear, concise, and easy to complete. Evaluation forms are usually distributed and collected at the end of each program offering. They should deal with the following concerns:

(a) **Program Effectiveness** — Did participants enjoy themselves? How did they benefit? Would they recommend the program to a friend?

(b) **Leader Effectiveness** — Was the instructor satisfactory, exceptional, inadequate? What did participants enjoy most about the instructor? Least?

(c) **Council Planning** — How did participants learn about the program? Do they have suggestions for other activities? Would they be interested in leading a program? Joining the Council? Are there any other comments?

By tabulating and analyzing the data collected, the council will discover how the community feels about the community school. Future program directions will become apparent and citizen involvement will be stimulated. The information derived from program evaluations can provide a basis for future programming. The community school program can be continually renewed by identifying responsive programs, soliciting new program ideas, and recruiting new program leaders and council members.

A Brief Wrap-Up

Community school programming requires common sense and good listening techniques. The council must: (1) discover what people would enjoy doing; (2) develop ways to program these interests; (3) locate instructors; (4) make related arrangements, including financial planning; (5) publicize activities; and (6) learn who took part in the programs and how they felt about them.

Many programs will be repeated endlessly and will continue to meet a community need. Others may be offered once or twice and not be appropriate for replication. As long as participants are satisfied, interest is stimulated, and new programs are developed to meet existing needs, the council is fulfilling a major responsibility. The key to success in this area, however, lies in the continued sensitivity, creativity, and open attitude of the council. By actively soliciting fresh ideas and being honest in self-evaluating, the council will ensure the development of programs that respond dynamically to distinct community concerns.

VI. BUILDING COALITIONS

What Is a Coalition?

A coalition is a relationship among a number of groups, associations, and/or agencies in support of a common direction or purpose. For a community school, coalitions are useful in building organizational support systems between the council and other area agencies. They are an important component of a community school's operation because they can be effective in (1) improving service coordination; (2) making the most of resources; (3) expanding services; and (4) advocating for particular programs or broader issues.

What Types of Coalitions Are There?

Coalitions differ in both purpose and manner of operation. Most are formed to fulfill one or more of the following functions:

Programmatic — Many coalitions are formed to develop collaborative programming. By cooperating with other area groups, councils can offer services that might otherwise be beyond their available resources. In return, the council provides the collaborating agency with increased accessibility to community residents and the credibility inherent in community school partnership. For example, a program collaboration might take place when a council provides space for a local college to offer extension courses. In return, the college might supply the services of an instructor for a particular course the council wishes to develop. Such arrangements benefit both parties.

Coalitions can also be used to reduce unnecessary program duplication by encouraging information sharing. It is appropriate and desirable for councils to discuss concerns and assessments with other local agencies. Before a community school starts a teen program, the council should contact neighborhood youth programs. Local youth workers may have valuable suggestions for working with teens. They may have had to drop a program and be willing to help the council start a replacement. When considering senior programming, area senior housing projects might be approached. Perhaps senior programs could be coordinated with a city transportation service. Collaboration of this type can result in coordinated planning that makes the most of available resources.

Communication Networks — Every community schools should develop and maintain a directory of local agencies and services. By keeping informed of existing services and programs, the council can better determine local needs and plan for community school activities. The council's resource directory will prove useful in building future coalitions and in making service referrals.

Information sharing through a coalition can also be a source of innovative ideas. A program offered by one agency may provide the inspiration for service in another. For example, another agency's English as a Second Language program might inspire a council to offer family counseling for immigrant families. It is important that idea and information sharing be done cooperatively and supportively. Nothing destroys a coalition faster than mistrust between agencies. Never "steal" an idea, develop it.

Advocacy and Fund-Raising — Increasingly, coalitions are formed to advocate for needed community services. Rather than competing among themselves for limited resources, social service agencies and community schools are organizing together for increased support. This is an exciting trend but it does merit great caution. For an advocacy coalition to succeed, there must be (1) trust between coalition members; (2) open agreement of needs and objectives, and (3) clear understanding of roles and expectations during advocacy efforts. For this reason, it is most effective to enter into a coalition with agencies with whom the council has had successful past dealings. Advocacy coalitions often form around a single issue. When that issue is resolved, the coalition often dissolves.

Fund-raising coalitions are another significant trend, particularly during the present era of fiscal austerity. In these instances, groups collaboratively seek funding for jointly sponsored programs. This not only lessens competition for limited resources but also, at the same time, presents a cooperative program plan that is extremely attractive to funders.

Who Joins a Coalition?

The following list is intended to demonstrate the variety of organizations with which councils might work. The exact selection of cooperating agencies will differ according to local politics and needs.

School Department
Department of Human Services
Senior Citizen Centers
Youth Centers
Libraries
Museums
Hospitals
Office of Consumer Affairs
Universities and Colleges
Consumer Organizations
Health Department
YMCA
Churches
Community Centers
Community Development Corporation
Recreation Departments
Child Advocacy Organizations

Welfare Rights Groups
Craft Guilds
Private Schools
Legal Service Clinics
Neighborhood Task Forces
Civic Associations
Department of Mental Health
Civic Organizations
Fraternal Organizations
League of Women Voters
Day Care Centers
Business Associations
Tenants Rights Organizations

How Do Coalitions Function?

Informal — Most coalitions affecting community schools are informal. A council might work directly with one agency to develop joint programming and only send mailings or share information with another. Usually, no regular meetings are involved and there is no strictly-identifiable membership. Informal coalitions are the easiest to develop.

They often take the form of a resource pool of service agencies. Proper use of this pool can positively impact the use of existing resources.

Formal — Formal coalitions usually arise during periods of crisis. They will have a recognizable membership and well-defined goals and objectives. Very often they will develop out of political necessity, generally when service resources are threatened. Sometimes a formal structure develops out of a larger, more informal coalition. For example, a particular issue — tax cap propositions — arises that will negatively affect community services. To combat the crisis, agencies (many of which have previously worked together) will join forces to develop strategies to alleviate the problem. This may result in a coordinated write-in campaign, signature drive or large turn-out at a public meeting. Once the problem is resolved, coalition members weigh the value of continuing the formal structure or returning to their previous informal association.

How Does a Coalition Develop?

There are three basic steps in developing a community school coalition: identification, initiation, and evaluation.

Identification — The first step is to isolate the motivating issue and identify potential collaborating agencies. A list of potential agencies can be drawn from a city directory of service agencies, the Yellow Pages, referrals from council members, and the council's own resource directory. Once the list is compiled, the council can decide which agencies they wish to approach, do some background work and look for agencies that have demonstrated a commitment to, and effectiveness in, responding to community needs and concerns.

Initiation — The second step is to initiate the coalition. The council should begin by contacting the agencies on its list. Contact can be made by mail, telephone, or in

person. Care should be taken to explain the reason for having initiated contact. Be prepared to explain the community school's programs and mode of operation. Then, inquire into the potential collaborator's purpose, programs, structure and interest in collaboration. Agency reputations should be checked. Clearly, intuition is a factor in developing coalitions, particularly when it comes to assessing the degree to which the collaborating agency can be trusted.

Once initial contact has been made, the council should maintain contact with the interested parties. Continuing contact can be informal, consisting of mailings, occasional phone calls, or meetings. During this time, agencies will develop the trust and expectations necessary for an effective collaboration.

Evaluation — Coalitions should be continually evaluated. On-going collaborations need to be monitored to assure satisfaction of all sponsors. If a coalition is proving ineffective, it should be restructured or ended. The purpose of any coalition should be to best serve the community. If that purpose is not being fulfilled, the coalition and related strategies need to be reassessed.

The evaluative process should be informal, usually consisting of discussion at council meetings and with involved agencies. It is important for all agencies to agree that although a coalition entails some commitment, it is not necessarily eternal.

Coalitions can prove extremely beneficial to participating agencies. Resources, concerns, ideas, and support can all be maximized. But more importantly, they can result in the improved provision of needed and otherwise unavailable services for citizens.

VII. SUMMARY

Community Education is based upon citizen involvement and community decision-making. It is this essential grassroots participation that most distinguishes Community Education from other programs. Without it, Community Education as defined and described in this primer could not exist.

By joining a community school council, concerned citizens can fulfill vital leadership roles in determining and delivering responsive community services. Participants not only encounter stimulating challenges that promote personal growth, but also they experience unique opportunities to improve the quality of life in their community.

The foregoing chapters have attempted to outline how citizens can organize a community school. Hopefully, the reader has come away with a clear understanding of what Community Education is and how it works. The information set forth is not meant to be definitive. It is meant simply to point the way.